

DSMC Participates in Quest for Excellence VIII National Conference

College's Participation in Malcolm Baldrige Education Pilot Program Marks Milestone in DSMC's "Quality Journey"

MARY-JO HALL • COLLIE J. JOHNSON

The Defense Systems Management College (DSMC) was recognized for its participation in the Education Pilot Program of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award by an invitation to participate in "Quest for Excellence VIII," the national official conference of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. The national conference, held February 5-7, 1996, in the Washington Hilton and Towers Hotel, Washington, D.C., was convened for the purpose of:

- meeting leaders from the 1995 winning companies;
- learning how these companies developed and implemented their quality improvement processes;
- exploring each of the Baldrige Award criteria in detail with the people who have been through the process;
- hearing about their challenges, the improvements they made, and the results;
- learning how quality pays from past winners of the Baldrige Award, who discussed Service process quality and continuous improvement;
- making key contacts with executives from across the country who are transforming their organizations through quality improvement;

- discussing experiences and lessons learned from the Education and Health Care Pilot Programs with 1995 participants; and
- returning to work with comprehensive conference proceedings to share with colleagues.

The 1995 winners – Armstrong World Industries Building Products Operations and Corning Telecommunications Products Division – received their awards and described their organization in terms of each of the seven major Baldrige categories or criteria.

- Leadership
- Information and Analysis
- Strategic and Quality Planning
- Human Resource Development and Management
- Educational and Business Process Management
- School Performance Results
- Student Focus and Student and Stakeholder Satisfaction

Keynote Speaker

The U.S. Secretary of Commerce, Ronald H. Brown, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) are given joint responsibilities to develop and manage the Baldrige Award Program. Currently, NIST is also working with the American Society of Quality Control (ASQC) to administer the Education Pilot Program. Brown, as the keynote speaker, convened the conference with a mes-

sage that focused on quality, partnerships, management, and business excellence:

This is a very special event. Our focus today is on quality, on management, on business excellence, on partnerships, and on success – the right themes to stress as America prepares to compete in the 21st Century. Our focus today also is on the companies and practices that are keeping America – and America's goods and services – on the leading edge of a world in dramatic economic transition...I firmly believe that the 21st Century will belong to the American people because we share a commitment to excellence. And because America has always faced challenges to our future together, on common ground.

Brown also spoke of America's advantages in the battle for global economic competitiveness: our open and diverse culture, our undisputed leadership in many of the key industries of the future, our talented, adaptable workforce, our innovative, dynamic firms, our desire to work in partnership to get done what none of us can do alone. Noting that these advantages are enabling us to command new economic opportunities and regain our competitive edge in international markets, Brown stated that "America tops

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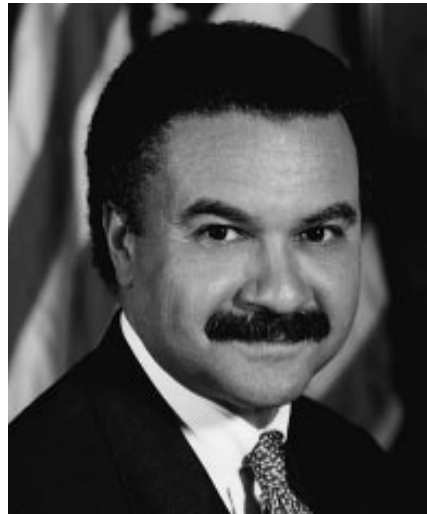
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the list of the world's most competitive economies, ahead of both Japan and Germany, according to the Geneva-based World Economic Forum. Our economic growth has been strong and steady."

Brown stated that the 1995 Baldrige Award winners and Pilot Program participants exemplify just how important it is to stretch for lofty goals. He believes they also illuminate for the rest of us the pathways to success in the 21st Century – investments in people, in innovation, and in public-private partnerships.

Fully supportive of the Pilot Programs to determine whether to expand the Baldrige National Quality Award to the health care and educational communities, Brown acknowledged that his Department and the NIST were very pleasantly surprised that 46 health care and 19 educational institutions submitted applications for the Pilot Programs in health care and education. But according to Brown, "Unfortunately, Congress did not agree with the President's request for the minimal funding that would have allowed the Pilot Programs to continue." He went on to say, however, that the President and the Congress remain committed to a formal quality awards program. Speaking to all the assembled conferees, Brown said that he "looks forward to the day when we have health care and education winners sharing the stage with their business counterparts."

Brown noted that more than a million copies of the Baldrige Award criteria are now widely circulated and accepted as the standard for quality excellence in business performance. By almost any measure, the Baldrige program has had a profound effect on shaping how people and organizations operate and work, with "work" being the operative word. And in spite of reduced funding for the Baldrige Award Program in Fiscal Year 1996, Brown believes the award will continue into the future because its benefits spread throughout our economy –



**Secretary of Commerce
Ronald H. Brown**

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in safer products, increased productivity, new job creation, and higher profitability.

In some respects, Brown believes the reduced funding for Baldrige ignores the realities of the marketplace. "We cannot take aim at partnerships with the private sector that stimulate risk-taking and innovation, including the Quality Program. We cannot afford to cut federal investments in civilian research and development by one-third over the next seven years."

According to Brown, President Clinton's plan – and vision – for a strong and prosperous future builds on America's advantages. It does so, in

part, by maintaining investments in science and technology, "the seed corn of tomorrow's industries and jobs." This is a message that Brown is confident the President will reinforce when he meets with the 1995 Baldrige winners at the White House in February 1996.

Self-assessment and Application Preparation

As one of three Education site visit organizations selected from a field of 19 applicants, DSMC, in October 1995, became the first government agency, based on the score given to its application, to receive a site visit by a team of Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award examiners. The purpose of the three-day examination was to verify and clarify issues in the application. Because there were no "winners" in the Education category, the site visit was recognition in and of itself.

The Education Pilot was highlighted in a concurrent session of the conference on February 7. Each of the three site visit organizations participated on panels covering:

- lessons learned from the Baldrige self-assessments and applications process;
- lessons learned from the site visits; and
- using the Feedback Report.

Professor Jesse E. Cox, Assessment Coordinator for DSMC, presented lessons learned from the self-assessment and the application process. In an in-depth review of the arduous planning, researching, and writing of the College's application, Cox laid out the details of how the College discussed, planned, and organized for its resulting 70-page application, which addressed 63 areas in the seven categories. A key action in the application process, according to Cox, "was appointing a project manager, Professor Jack McGovern, and category teams – each with its own leader. We also established an 'Operations Room' where storyboards were posted for

each category. This enhanced communications, because anyone could review any category at anytime. We also developed a library of all documents and interviews.”

Another key strategy Cox highlighted was the “Open House,” in which one of the category teams hosted the Open House for interviewing and researching their specific area. Public announcements were posted, which listed topics to be covered, questions, and issues. Personal contact was made with key people. Suggested documentation was brought to the session. The Open House concept was effective in bringing people and information together.

A “Lessons Learned” documentation file was also developed during the application process. Comdr. Brian Kelmar, USN, emerged as the authority on this part of the assessment. In putting together the application, DSMC learned about the criteria themselves, but most importantly, how the criteria are interrelated and how extensively processes and activities are cross-referenced.

Additionally, DSMC learned that many aspects of its educational system were not captured in writing, but were anecdotal and passed on verbally from worker to worker. The application research took an extensive amount of time. The team members prepared the application in conjunction with their regular work. Starting in late January 1995, they worked toward a May 8, 1995 submission date. Proofing, editing, and printing time were factored in.

According to Cox, an overarching purpose in participating in the Pilot was to get objective feedback on the College’s initiatives to change to an organization that is more customer-focused, process-oriented, uses data to make decisions, and has the total involvement of everyone in the organization.

Concluding his presentation, Cox reiterated that the Baldrige assessment process uses common standards and



DSMC REPRESENTATIVES AND THE SENIOR SCIENTIST EMERITUS OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STANDARDS AND TECHNOLOGY, CURT REIMANN, ATTENDED THE QUEST FOR EXCELLENCE VIII NATIONAL CONFERENCE, FEBRUARY 5-7, 1996, AT THE WASHINGTON HILTON AND TOWERS HOTEL, WASHINGTON, D.C. REIMANN, ALONG WITH FORMER SECRETARY OF COMMERCE MALCOLM BALDRIGE, IS CONSIDERED A “FOUNDING FATHER” OF THE MALCOLM BALDRIGE NATIONAL QUALITY AWARD. PICTURED FROM LEFT: DR. MARY-JO HALL, SPECIAL ASSISTANT FOR QUALITY, DSMC; PROFESSOR JESSE COX, ASSESSMENT COORDINATOR FOR DSMC; REIMANN; BRIG. GEN. CLAUDE M. BOLTON, JR., DSMC COMMANDANT.

language. It uses a *systems* approach to focus on results and outcomes. “Assessing ourselves in this manner enhanced our ability to discuss our progress with others. Besides learning about ourselves we learned about the criteria. It soon became clear that our approach to continual improvement was more mature than our deployment and results. For example, we did not have a systematic way to collect, analyze, and use data to improve our processes. We didn’t benchmark our processes against other organizations to an appropriate extent. While we are moving forward to remove division stovepipes through work with our Strategic Processes, the criteria helped us to see a much higher level of systems integration.”

The Site Visit Experience

The College’s Special Assistant for Quality, Mary-jo Hall, shared the College’s experiences in preparing for the site visit phase of the evaluation. Like the application process, there were many lessons learned from the site visit. According to Hall, “To say the least we were elated to be selected as one of three to get to the site visit level. While we are pleased with our journey and the progress we have made, we

know that there is much work to be done. However, the site visit was an opportunity to celebrate. As the Commandant, Brig. Gen. Claude M. Bolton, Jr., USAF, stated, participating in a site visit was a ‘win.’”

The purpose of site visits is to verify the application and clarify any issues raised during the reading phase. Six evaluators certified in the Baldrige Criteria were on the team. To prepare for the site visit, DSMC relied on the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle and the use of project management tools such as Gantt and milestone charts. The primary responsibility for planning the site visit was given to Hall and Cox. The planning included brainstorming ideas, affinitizing the ideas, drafting a Plan of Action, and developing checklists with milestones and people. Once this was presented to the leadership and changes made, everyone involved convened to discuss, change, and begin implementing the Plan of Action.

Category team leaders were key. They reviewed the application and developed a point of contact list for every item in the application. Additionally, a notebook was developed for each category. These books contained all back-up data for every item in case the team

leader became unavailable during the actual site visit. The notebooks were added to the Baldrige Library.

In accordance with the site visit directions, notebooks were also put together for each of the evaluators. Short briefings were prepared for the opening and the closing sessions. The opening session was designed with a 15-minute reception to allow evaluators and DSMC members to get to know each other. Col. Sam Brown, USAF, Dean, Academic Programs Division, gave the opening remarks; and Col. Bill Knight, USA, Dean, Division of College Administration and Services, conducted an overview tour of the eight buildings on the Belvoir campus.

A vital aspect of the site visit was continual communication to all members. Information was briefed via electronic bulletin board and the local area television network. The information related primarily to purpose (clarify and verify) and status (dates, etc.). However, there was not preparation in the form of practice interviews for employees. The DSMC aim was to get the most accurate assessment possible. The College did not want to put words together for those members who would possibly be interviewed. "We were fortunate enough to have a former Baldrige winner discuss a site visit with the leadership and the Baldrige team," Hall stated. "This was most valuable in terms of describing the site visit process."

We talked with NIST and the Evaluator Team leader, Edward Gore, Jr., of Sacred Heart University, frequently. We had reviews and made adjustments. We did a short final and continually reviewed the milestone chart. Even with all of the planning, doing, studying, and re-doing, there were some surprises.

- We anticipated "stovepipe" questions by category, when in fact the questions are integrated across categories.

- We expected more requests for documentation.

- We thought the evaluators would talk to 150 people in sound bites rather than 30-plus folks in detail.
- More DSMC employees than anticipated wanted to tell their story to the evaluators."

As a military organization, DSMC is used to planning and executing a specific defined task. The College does contingency planning as a normal part of business. As a senior military college, DSMC continually hosts dignitaries and provides facilities for other agencies to hold meetings. So having the evaluators on campus was not a unique experience. Nor one in which DSMC had to do activities different from their daily practice. However, one hiccup that the College had to deal with midstream was tracking "who" was "where" on the interview schedule. (The evaluators were independently booking the same employee at the same time.) This change was effected by the operations officer in charge, who proved invaluable in real-time coordination.

Again, flexibility was the key. Because of scheduling conflicts, the evaluators met with the Commandant on Sunday at their hotel. With the purpose of a "real assessment," this fit the DSMC way, where rarely is everyone in one place at one time.

The assessment and completing the application were a tremendous resource drain. The benefits came with using the feedback to make those midstream corrections to the organizational improvement strategies. Using the strengths and the areas for improvement is critical to get a return on the project. According to Bolton, "our primary aim is to maintain those efforts that resulted in our strengths in the seven categories and figure out the areas for improvement that we will be able to achieve (by process of analysis, categorization, prioritization, and implementation), which will optimize the overall system and use the full capabilities of every employee."

In implementing quality management at DSMC, Hall stated that, "We use a three-pronged approach. We must apply the theory to our administrative processes, we must teach the concepts in our curriculum, and we must operationalize the theory in the learning process. Therefore, unlike a manufacturing organization, we must approach changing methodologies and value added to the learning process, which is not easily measured."

The site visit phase of the evaluation gave DSMC an unprecedented opportunity to recognize that its approach to changing the way the College operates is on target, and it offered the College an opportunity to celebrate. Participating in the site visit also provided DSMC an opportunity to communicate its efforts both internally and externally.

Hall went on to speak of DSMC's efforts to "model" the College's strategic direction. "We have spent almost three years building, developing, and refining our strategic direction. We have even built a 'model' in the form of a pyramid so that we can 'see' our direction more clearly. This is a strength, and we must continue to work on our strategic direction. We must use this model to help align all people, processes, and measures to better serve our customers. We can build on this model to help separate the strategic from the tactical. We can see how every person contributes to the vision. Additionally, we can use this strength to enhance and refine our measurement system – to be able to easily define operational, financial, and quality goals. The Baldrige Criteria along with the Government Performance and Results Act serve as standards to achieving this capacity."

Our Areas for Improvement can serve as guideposts to shape a systematic approach to continual improvement. We are at a critical stage in our Quality Journey. We've accomplished enough to be on the Journey – but not enough to have the change strategy deployed throughout the organization.

Now we must prioritize what is going to leverage past efforts and push us to the higher levels where noticeable trends and results are achievable.

We can't do all of the improvements. We must determine priority by analysis of both impact and urgency. And then we must move forward. We must reinvent our behaviors by continually enhancing each individual's ability to consistently meet the customers needs and exceed their expectations. Like other customer data feedback, we will consider the Baldrige when we do our gap analysis for our Strategic Planning. This then, will impact our strategic goals, objectives, and measures."

Summarizing her presentation, Hall said that, "Participating in the Baldrige Education Pilot has been an asset to accomplishing our vision of being the academy of distinction promoting systems management excellence. It has required discipline to embark on a change effort that will take years. It has involved thinking and behaving in a way that focuses on customer requirements, managing processes rather than fighting fires, using data to make decisions, and creating an environment where everyone is involved in continual improvement.

The results of the Pilot confirm that our efforts over the past three years are effective. However, the difficult part is just beginning. Making the leap from activities that are checked off, to learning from every process is a major behavioral change. Everyone will have to commit head, hands, and heart. This is now both an organizational and a personal journey. Clearly, everyone must be engaged to meet our daily challenges in a quality manner."

DSMC, The Feedback Report, And Its Use

Brig. Gen. Claude M. Bolton, Jr., USAF, DSMC Commandant, represented the College during the session on "The Feedback Report and Its Use." He began by outlining what he considers three of the most important questions to be answered in soliciting feedback:

- What do our customers want? He defined "customers" as our acquisition workforce in the field, the men and women that DSMC trains and educates (about 10 thousand students a year).
- Do our organization and our organizational structure support what our customers want from us? In 1995 DSMC, with the cooperation and involvement of the entire College, realigned its organizational structure and redid a number of courses – all in support of what the DSMC customers said they wanted.
- How do we know from year to year that we're still doing the right thing? The answer which surfaced most often was that DSMC needed to do a Baldrige assessment each year. "I consider this [Baldrige assessment] very important because now we take this feedback back to our College, and we try to figure out how we can do things better. This is a process that I would like to see continued." In the interim, Professor Jesse Cox, Academic Programs Division, will oversee the College's yearly assessment using the Baldrige criteria.

Bolton next spoke of the strengths DSMC gained from participating in the Baldrige Education Pilot. First, it gave DSMC a chance to celebrate. "We thought we'd get a little feedback, and then we'd go and work on that. We never thought that we would be here today as one of the finalists talking to all of you. All we really anticipated was the feedback and to be compared against great institutions throughout the United States. So again, celebration was a decided strength."

The second strength, according to Bolton, was an objective confirmation. "The Baldrige criteria, the assessment process, is a standard – and you're going up against academic institutions across the country. It's a great benchmark for us."

The last strength he mentioned was in the area of communication. "Going through the application process," said Bolton, "was a learn-

ing experience for all of us, and we're finding out how well we're doing. The approach that we're on says we're on the right track or at least in the ballpark – not off doing something that we ought not to be doing." Bolton went on to say that the College has begun work on several initiatives that promise great results, not just smoke and mirrors, and they're going to work on achieving those initiatives.

Referring to a College-wide mindset that has worked well in the past, Bolton commented, "Down at our school [DSMC], we have a saying that if anything goes *right*, it's *your* fault; if anything goes *wrong*, it's *my* fault." And it works out very well. Bolton believes this mindset, coupled with the College's vision, mission, and strategic goals keeps DSMC constantly focused on its customers.

Bolton noted that although DSMC is not accredited, they do have a Board of Visitors from the Defense Acquisition University and its Consortium Schools, which meets every six months to take a look at the College and offer their outside view. The College also surveys customers on a regular basis. Every six months Bolton goes out to field commanders as well as the Department of Defense Acquisition Secretaries in the various Military Departments to solicit feedback on whether the College is doing the right thing for each of their respective Services.

Summarizing his presentation, Bolton said that "we're going to maintain doing what we do now very well. We're going to see what we're going to have to do to improve in the future, and then be ready for the next offering of the Baldrige assessment."

Editor's Note: Bolton's presentation was followed by a question-and-answer session, which appears following this article.